

APPLICATION

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FOR UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT

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SPECIFICATION

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TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

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BE IT KNOWN THAT I, **Dale D. Cormican**, a citizen of the United States, have invented a new and useful method of manufacturing a ski of which the following is a specification:

Method of Manufacturing a Ski

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

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Cross-Reference to Related U.S. Patent Application

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I hereby claim benefit under Title 35, United States Code, Section 120 of United States patent application Serial Number 09/130,892 filed August 7, 1998. This application is a continuation-in-part of the 09/130,892 application. The 09/130,892 application is currently pending. The 09/130,892 application is hereby incorporated by reference into this patent application.

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Field of the Invention

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The present invention relates generally to methods for manufacturing skis for use upon snowmobiles and like vehicles that operate upon snow, and more specifically it relates to a method of manufacturing a ski for creating a preload force upon a front portion of a ski in combination with a resilient preload member.

Description of the Prior Art

Skis for snowmobiles and like vehicles have been in use for years. A snowmobile or like vehicle typically is comprised of a frame, a track within the rear portion of the vehicle, and a pair of skis controllably attached to a steering structure of the vehicle. Skis are utilized for supporting and steering the vehicle during operation upon snow and other surfaces.

Skis for snowmobiles and like vehicles are typically constructed of either metal, or a combination of metal and plastic. Regardless of the material utilized, conventional skis for snowmobiles and like vehicles are manufactured utilizing the same process as shown in Figures 1 and 2 of the drawings. More particularly, the ski is molded with the desired curvature within the front portion of the ski and a loop member is attached to the tip of the front portion and the ski without stressing the front portion of the ski (i.e. the front portion is in a relatively relaxed state). Figures 1 and 2 also illustrate the usage of a rigid metal saddle removably attached to an upper surface of the ski body for securing to the snowmobile.

Regarding metal only skis, each ski is formed into an elongate rigid structure having a relatively straight rear to middle portion with a front portion containing a desired curvature utilizing conventional metal working procedures without stress existing within the front portion. A stiff loop member, usually constructed of an elongate metal rod structure, is attached to the front end of the ski and to the middle portion of the ski. The loop member is typically welded to the front end of the ski and to the middle portion of the ski. The loop member is designed for preventing the pointed front end from injuring a third-party, for grasping when attempting to move the snowmobile, and for increasing the overall strength of the front portion when encountering obstacles during forward movement of the vehicle.

More recently, skis for snowmobiles and like vehicles have been constructed of a combination metal and resilient plastic, such as ultra high molecular weight (UHMW) polyethylene, which allows for increased flexibility of the ski when encountering obstacles. The main body of the ski is comprised of a plastic material typically manufactured utilizing injection molding or blow molding wherein the rear portion to middle portion is molded relatively straight with the front portion molded to possess the desired curvature without stress existing within the front portion. A rigid metal saddle is attached to the middle portion of the plastic ski for allowing attachment of the ski to the front suspension of the snowmobile. A loop member, typically constructed of plastic, is attached to the front end of the ski and then to the middle portion of the ski with no stress contained within the front portion thereof. As with loop members utilized with metal skis, the loop member is designed for preventing the front end of the ski from injuring a third-party, for grasping when attempting to move the snowmobile, and for increasing the overall strength of the front portion when encountering obstacles during forward movement of the vehicle.

One of the main problems with conventional ski manufacturing processes, for either metal or metal-plastic skis, is that they mold the front portion of the ski into the desired curvature and then secure a loop member between the middle of the ski to the front end of the ski in order to keep the front end of the ski from bending rearwardly when engaging obstacles. A further problem with conventional ski manufacturing processes is that they cause the front portion of the ski to be less flexible because of the loop member attempts to keep the front end of the ski in the current position. A further problem with conventional ski manufacturing processes is that the combination of the loop member and the static curved portion creates a rigid structure that is unable to significantly flex when encountering an obstacle. Another problem with conventional ski manufacturing processes is that the rigid front portion of the ski attempts to "pivot" about the connection point of the loop member in the middle portion of the ski since the front portion is unable to significantly flex when encountering an obstacle.

While conventional ski manufacturing processes may be suitable for the particular purpose to which they address, they are not as suitable for creating a preload force upon a front portion of a ski utilizing a resilient preload member thereby enhancing the overall performance of the ski. Conventional ski manufacturing processes create a semi-rigid structure within the front portion of the ski thereby reducing their ability to properly flex when encountering obstacles.

In these respects, the method of manufacturing a ski according to the present invention substantially departs from the conventional concepts and designs of the prior art, and in so doing provides an apparatus primarily developed for the purpose of creating a preload force upon a front portion of a ski in combination with a resilient preload member.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In view of the foregoing disadvantages inherent in the known types of skis and
5 ski manufacturing processes now present in the prior art, the present invention
provides a new method of manufacturing a ski wherein the same can be utilized for
creating a preload force upon a front portion of a ski in combination with a resilient
preload member.

10 The general purpose of the present invention, which will be described
subsequently in greater detail, is to provide a new method of manufacturing a ski that
has many of the advantages of the skis and method of manufacturing mentioned
heretofore and many novel features that result in a new method of manufacturing a ski
which is not anticipated, rendered obvious, suggested, or even implied by any of the
15 prior art, either alone or in any combination thereof.

To attain this, the present invention generally comprises the steps of molding an
elongate ski body having a front portion in a position P1, removing the elongate ski
body from the mold after solidified, applying a force upon a front portion of the
20 elongate ski body thereby bowing the front portion into position P2, securing a preload
member to the front portion and a middle portion of the elongate ski body, and
releasing the force applied to the front portion whereby the resiliency of the front
portion deforms the preload member until the front portion is into position P3.
Position P1 of the elongate ski body is preferably less than 20 degrees with respect to a
25 longitudinal axis of the elongate ski body.

There has thus been outlined, rather broadly, the more important features of the
invention in order that the detailed description thereof may be better understood, and
in order that the present contribution to the art may be better appreciated. There are

additional features of the invention that will be described hereinafter and that will form the subject matter of the claims appended hereto.

In this respect, before explaining at least one embodiment of the invention in detail, it is to be understood that the invention is not limited in its application to the details of construction and to the arrangements of the components set forth in the following description or illustrated in the drawings. The invention is capable of other embodiments and of being practiced and carried out in various ways. Also, it is to be understood that the phraseology and terminology employed herein are for the purpose of the description and should not be regarded as limiting.

A primary object of the present invention is to provide a method of manufacturing a ski that will overcome the shortcomings of the prior art devices.

A second object is to provide a method of manufacturing a ski for creating a preload force upon a front portion of a ski utilizing a resilient preload member.

Another object is to provide a method of manufacturing a ski that does not create a "pivot point" within the middle portion of the ski.

An additional object is to provide a method of manufacturing a ski that increases the overall performance of the ski in a variety of conditions.

A further object is to provide a method of manufacturing a ski that allows the front portion of the ski to flex rearwardly without resistance by a loop member.

A further object is to provide a method of manufacturing a ski that allows for the front portion of the ski to be molded either significantly straight or with a slight curvature.

Another object is to provide a method of manufacturing a ski that provides a ski wherein the loop member is able to absorb a significant amount of rearward and upwardly movement by the front portion of the ski without providing a counteracting force thereto.

Other objects and advantages of the present invention will become obvious to the reader and it is intended that these objects and advantages are within the scope of the present invention.

To the accomplishment of the above and related objects, this invention may be embodied in the form illustrated in the accompanying drawings, attention being called to the fact, however, that the drawings are illustrative only, and that changes may be made in the specific construction illustrated and described within the scope of the appended claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Various other objects, features and attendant advantages of the present invention will become fully appreciated as the same becomes better understood when considered in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which like reference characters designate the same or similar parts throughout the several views, and wherein:

FIG. 1 is a side view of a prior art manufactured ski body illustrating the front portion being molded with the desired curvature within without being stressed.

FIG. 2 is a side view of the prior art with the loop member attached to the middle portion and the front end of the ski without stressing the front portion of the ski.

FIG. 3 is a flowchart illustrating the overall manufacturing process of the present invention.

FIG. 4 is an upper perspective view of the elongate ski body as initially molded with the front portion in a substantially straight structure.

FIG. 5 is a top view of the elongate ski body as initially molded with the front portion in a substantially straight structure.

FIG. 6 is a front end view of the elongate ski body as initially molded with the front portion in a substantially straight structure.

FIG. 7 is a side view of the elongate ski body as initially molded with the front portion in a substantially straight structure.

FIG. 8 is a side view of the elongate ski body with the front portion being bowed from position P1 to position P2 having an angle θ between the relative positions.

FIG. 9 is a side view of the elongate ski body positioned at position P2 with the resilient preload member positioned above the ski body prior to installation thereof.

FIG. 10 is a magnified exploded perspective view of the front portion of the ski with the preload member.

FIG. 11 is a side view of the preload member attached to the front end and the middle portion of the ski body illustrating the forward force of the front portion stressing the preload member until the front portion is within position P3.

FIG. 12 is a side view of the preload member attached to the front end and the middle portion of the ski body with the front portion retained within position P3 by the preload member.

FIG. 13 is an upper perspective view of the elongate ski body and loop member with the front portion of the ski body retained within the desired curvature.

FIG. 14 is a front end view of the ski body with the front portion bowed upwardly and rearwardly.

FIG. 15 is a top view of the elongate ski body with the front portion bowed upwardly and rearwardly.

FIG. 16 is a side view of the elongate ski body with the front portion retained within a bowed position by an alternative preload member.

5 FIG. 17 is a side view of the elongate ski body with the front portion retained within a bowed position by a second alternative preload member.

FIG. 18 is a side view of the elongate ski body with the front portion retained within a bowed position by a third alternative preload member.

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FIG. 19 is a side view of the elongate ski body as initially molded wherein the front portion has either a preformed slight curvature or angle thereto.

15 FIG. 20 is a side view of the elongate ski body of Figure 19 with the front portion being bowed from position P1 to position P2 having an angle θ between the relative positions.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

A. Overview

Turning now descriptively to the drawings, in which similar reference characters denote similar elements throughout the several views, FIGS. 1 through 20 illustrate a method of manufacturing a ski 10, which basically comprises the steps of molding an elongate ski body 20 having a front portion 22 in an initial position P1, removing the elongate ski body 20 from the mold after solidified, applying a force upon a front portion 22 of the elongate ski body 20 thereby bowing the front portion 22 into an intermediary position P2, securing a preload member 50 to the front portion 22 and a middle portion 26 of the elongate ski body 20, and releasing the force applied to the front portion 22 whereby the resiliency of the front portion 22 deforms the preload member 50 until the front portion 22 is into a final position P3. Position P1 of the elongate ski body 20 is preferably less than 20 degrees with respect to a longitudinal axis of the elongate ski body 20.

B. Molding the Elongate Body

As shown in Figures 3 through 7, the first step within the manufacturing process is to mold an elongate body 20 having a relatively straight structure when compared to the final manipulated ski structure. The elongate body 20 is preferably comprised of a resilient and flexible material such as but not limited to ultra high molecular weight (UHMW) polyethylene. It can be appreciated that various other types of resilient and flexible materials may be utilized to construct the elongate body 20. Furthermore, the elongate body 20 may be created utilizing various molding processes such as but not limited to injection molding. Once the elongate body 20 has solidified, the elongate body 20 is removed from the respective mold by various conventional removal means.

As further shown in Figures 4 through 7 of the drawings, the elongate body **20** is basically comprised of a front portion **22** having a front end **24**, a middle portion **26** and a rear portion **28** having a rear end **29**. The elongate body **20** has a generally flat structure except for the saddle portion **40** and the keel member **30** as best illustrated in Figures 4, 6 and 7 of the drawings. It can be appreciated that the elongate body **20** may have various shapes other than a flat shape that are able to act as a ski. The elongate body **20** has an upper surface and a lower surface which are substantially parallel to one another which may have a varying or consistent thickness throughout.

As shown in Figures 4 through 7 of the drawings, a saddle portion **40** extends upwardly from the upper surface of the elongate body **20**. The saddle portion **40** is preferably molded integral within the elongate body **20**, however the saddle portion **40** may be attached to the elongate body **20** by conventional fastening means. The saddle portion **40** extends from the middle portion **26** of the elongate body **20** thereby substantially defining the middle portion **26** of the elongate body **20** with the front portion **22** and the rear portion **28** on opposing ends of the saddle portion **40**. The middle portion **26** may extend a finite distance past the distal ends of the saddle portion **40** as can be appreciated. The boundaries of the middle portion **26** therefore should not be limited to the area of the elongate body **20** supporting the saddle portion **40**. It should be noted that the terminology front portion **22**, middle portion **26** and rear portion **28** are merely utilized to illustrate the present invention and should not limit the scope of the invention.

The saddle portion **40** is preferably comprised of a first member **42** and a second member **44** extending substantially parallel to one another in a distally spaced relationship as is best illustrated in Figure 4 of the drawings. Each member **42**, **44** includes a main aperture **46** for receiving a pin member that secures the elongate body **20** to the front suspension of a snowmobile or like vehicle. The saddle portion **40** may have various shapes other than that illustrated within the drawings.

As shown in Figures 4, 6 and 7 of the drawings, the rear end **29** of the rear portion **28** is preferably curved for allowing the elongate body **20** to move rearwardly without catching upon the surface. However, it can be appreciated that the rear end **29** may have various other shapes such as but not limited to straight and slanted.

The rear portion **28**, middle portion **26** and the front portion **22** define a substantially straight structure having a longitudinal axis extending from the rear portion **28** to the middle portion **26** of the elongate body **20**, wherein the longitudinal axis is parallel to the upper surface of the middle portion **26** of the elongate body **20**. The front portion **22** is initially molded into a position P1 as shown in Figures 7 and 8 of the drawings. The outer perimeter of the front portion **22** preferably is thicker than the central portion thereof for providing a warped structure when bent, however it can be appreciated that the front portion **22** may be comprised of a flat structure or variations thereof to achieve various results.

The position P1 is represented by a phantom line extending from the front end **24** that is parallel to the upper surface of the front end **24** of the front portion **22** of the elongate body **20** as best illustrated in Figure 7 of the drawings. The position P1 preferably has an angle of less than 20 degrees with respect to the longitudinal axis of the elongate body **20**. The position P1 may extend upwardly or downwardly with respect to the longitudinal axis in a range of plus or minus 20 degrees respectively. The applicant has found that the best results occur when the initial molded position P1 is between 0 to 10 degrees with respect to the longitudinal axis. Figures 19 and 20 illustrate the elongate body **20** with the front portion **22** initially molded with a curvature, slant or other inclined structure with the initial position P1 approximately 10 degrees with respect to the longitudinal axis.

At least one pair of receiving apertures **48** extend through the saddle portion **40** in opposition to one another adjacent the front portion **22** of the elongate body **20** as further shown in Figure 4 of the drawings. More than one pair of receiving apertures **48** is preferably utilized for allowing for the adjustment of the preload member **50**.

5 The receiving apertures **48** are formed for receiving at least one fastener **60** extending through the preload member **50** for securing the preload member **50** to the middle portion **26** of the elongate body **20**. It can be appreciated that various other connection means may be utilized to secure the preload member **50** to the middle portion **26** of the elongate body **20** and the illustration of the receiving apertures **48** should not limit the
10 scope of the invention. For example, the preload member **50** may be attached nonmovably or movably to the middle portion **26** of the elongate body **20** without being attached directly to the saddle portion **40**.

As shown in Figure 7 of the drawings, at least one keel member **30** preferably
15 extends from a lower surface of the elongate body **20** that is utilized for increasing the steering abilities of the finalized product. The keel member **30** may extend from or near the rear end **29** to the front portion **22** of the elongate body **20**. The keel member **30** is preferably centered within the lower surface of the elongate body **20**, however it can be appreciated that various other locations upon the elongate body **20** may be
20 utilized particularly if multiple keel members **30** are utilized. The keel member **30** is preferably parallel to the longitudinal axis of the elongate body **20**. The keel member **30** is preferably molded within the elongate body **20**, however the keel member **30** may be removably attached thereto. In addition, the keel member **30** is preferably formed for receiving a wear rod member (not shown) commonly utilized upon snowmobile
25 skis and the like for reducing wear upon the keel member **30** and the elongate body **20** during usage.

C. Bending the Front Portion

After the elongate body **20** is removed from the mold, the user then applies an upward and/or rearward bending force upon the front portion **22** of the elongate body **20**. The bending force is preferably applied with the elongate body **20** within a solidified and relatively cooled state to allow for a sufficient bowing force to exist within the front portion **22** when manipulated. The bending force may be applied utilizing various types of tools, mechanical devices or simply with an individual physically applying force to the elongate body **20** in a controlled manner. The front end **24** or adjacent thereto is preferably engaged with the bending force to achieve the most desirable results.

The bending force causes the front portion **22** to bow upwardly and rearwardly until the front portion **22** is formed into the intermediary position P2 as shown in Figures 8 and 20 of the drawings. The intermediary position P2 has an angle θ with respect to the initial position P1 as shown in Figures 8 and 20 of the drawings. The intermediary position P2 allows for the attachment of the preload member **50** to the front end **24** and the middle portion **26** of the elongate body **20**. The angle θ shown in Figure 8 is approximately 48 degrees and the angle θ shown in Figure 20 is approximately 33 degrees. It can be appreciated that the angle θ will vary depending upon the initial position P1 and the intermediary position P2. However, the angle θ is preferably at least 10 degrees to provide for sufficient tensioning of the front portion **22** and the preload member **50**.

It should be noted that when the front portion **22** is bowed upwardly and rearwardly that a first portion of the front portion **22** will bow outwardly from opposing sides of the center keel member **30** as shown in Figure 14 of the drawings. The first portion of the front portion **22** of the elongate body **20** containing the outwardly bowed structure allows for the directing of snow inwardly toward the central

portion of the elongate body **20** thereby increasing the ability of the elongate body **20** to float and steer upon the snow surface.

D. Securing the Preload Member

5 The preload member **50** is preferably comprised of a resilient and flexible material for creating a preload within the front portion **22** of the elongate body **20** and within the preload member **50**. The preload member **50** may have various structures as illustrated in Figures 9 through 18 of the drawings. For example, the preload member **50** may have a first section with a straight structure and a second section with a curved
10 structure as shown in Figure 18 of the drawings. The preload member **50** may have an overall curved structure as shown in Figure 17 of the drawings.

 The inventor has determined that the best mode of manufacturing and operating the present invention is to mold a preload member **50** comprised of a first segment **58**
15 and a second segment **59** wherein the segments **58**, **59** are with respect to one another at an angle. The segments **58**, **59** are preferably at least 90 degrees with respect to one another, however greater or less angles may be utilized to construct the preload member **50**. In addition, the first segment **58** is preferably longer than the second segment **59** as is best illustrated in Figure 11 of the drawings. The first segment **58**
20 and the second segment **59** are preferably comprised of a straight structures, however various other structures may be utilized. The first segment **58** and the second segment **59** are preferably molded as a single unit, however it can be appreciated that the preload member **50** may be comprised of a plurality of components secured together.

25 The preload member **50** has a first end **52** and a second end **56** that are attached to the middle portion **26** and the front portion **22** of the elongate body **20** respectively. The second end **56** may have various shapes and structures thereto for allowing movable or non-movable attachment thereof to the front portion **22** of the elongate body **20**. The second end **56** is preferably attached to or near the front end **24** of the

elongate body 20 as best illustrated in Figure 10 of the drawings. The second end 56 preferably includes at least one second aperture 57 extending through for receiving a second fastener 60 that extends through a front aperture 25 within the front end 24 of the elongate body 20. The fastener 60 secures the second end 56 of the preload member 50 to the front portion 22 of the elongate body 20 utilizing a conventional nut 64 and washer 62 combination or variations thereof. It can be appreciated that various other securing means may be utilized to secure the second end 56 of the preload member 50 to the front portion 22 of the elongate body 20.

The first end 52 may be comprised of various structures other than the tubular structure illustrated within Figures 9 and 10 of the drawings. The first end 52 is preferably formed to fit between the members 42, 44 of the saddle portion 40 with a fastener 60 extending through the appropriate receiving apertures 48 and a first aperture 54 within the first end 52. The first aperture 54 may have various shapes and sizes as can be appreciated to allow for the movement or non-movement of the second end 56. It can be appreciated that the first end 52 may be nonmovably or movably secured within the middle portion 26 of the elongate body 20 to achieve various results. A nut 64 and washer 62, or similar locking means, are secured about the threaded portion of the fastener 60 for securing the first end 52 of the preload member 50 to the middle portion 26 of the elongate body 20. The first end 52 may be secured by various other securing means as may be suitable for usage upon the elongate body 20.

It can be appreciated that the first end 52 or the second end 56 may be secured to the middle portion 26 or the front portion 22 of the elongate body 20 when the elongate body 20 is within the relaxed P1 position. The unattached end 52, 56 is simply attached appropriately when the front portion 22 is manipulated to intermediary position P2. In the preferred embodiment, the user secures the second end 56 of the

preload member **50** to the front portion **22** prior to bending of the front portion **22** thereby allowing for simple attachment of the preload member **50**.

If the second end **56** is initially attached to the front portion **22** of the elongate body **20**, then the user is able to properly align the first end **52** with the desired receiving apertures **48**. For example, if the user desires to have a greater preload force within the front portion **22** and the preload member **50**, the user would secure the first end **52** to a pair of receiving apertures **48** further away from the front portion **22** thereby requiring intermediary position P2 to be at a greater angle with respect to initial relaxed position P1. If the user desires to have a lesser preload force within the front portion **22** and the preload member **50**, the user would secure the first end **52** to a pair of receiving apertures **48** closer to the front portion **22** thereby requiring intermediary position P2 to be at a lesser angle with respect to initial relaxed position P1.

Depending upon the number of securing positions available, the user may create various levels of preloads upon the front portion **22** and the preload member **50**. For example, if the first end **52** of the preload member **50** is mounted to the most forward of the variable receiving apertures **48**, the amount of preload force placed upon the elongate body **20** is relatively small, therefore, providing a softer ride that is the recommended setting for riders of lighter weights. Conversely, if the first end **52** of the preload member **50** is mounted to the most rearward of the variable receiving apertures **48**, the amount of preload force placed upon the elongate body **20** is relatively large, therefore, providing a stiffer ride that is the recommended setting for riders of heavier weights. These adjustments can also be made to compensate for varying types of conditions and for the type of riding to be done. Therefore, the present invention provides a means by which the handling characteristics of the skis can varied to improve the efficiency of the vehicle. This is especially important in racing where different tracks present a varying set of problems that can be overcome by simply adjusting the skis.

E. Removing the Bending Force

Once the preload member **50** has been fully or at least partially secured between the middle portion **26** and the front portion **22** of the elongate body **20**, the user then releases the bending force from the front portion **22**. It can be appreciated that the bending force may be removed prior to the attachment of the preload member **50** if the front portion **22** is bowed sufficiently to compensate for the straightening of the front portion **50** to the original molded position thereby allowing sufficient time to allow for the preload member **50** to be fully attached. The front portion **22** thereafter attempts to return to the initial relaxed position P1 except that the preload member **50** prevents the front portion **22** from returning to the relaxed position P1. The preload member **50** is able to return a finite distance to final position P3 which has an angle β with respect to intermediary position P2 and an angle ϕ with respect to initial position P1 as shown in Figure 12 of the drawings. The angle β may be comprised of various angles between 0.2 to 15 degrees depending upon the stresses, materials and structures involved. The angle ϕ may also be comprised of various angles which typically range between 15 to 40 degrees.

The front portion **22** is able to return to final position P3 because the preload member **50** becomes stressed with an equal and opposite force of that provided by the front portion **22** which is in stress. As shown in Figure 12 of the drawings, the preload member **50** becomes bowed because of the force applied thereto by the front portion **22** of the elongate body **20**. More particularly, the first segment **58** and the second segment **59** typically have an increased angle between thereof. In addition, the first segment **58** typically gains a slight curvature thereto as is illustrated in Figure 12 of the drawings. Different structures of the preload member **50**, such as a curved structure, will similarly bow to balance the force applied by the front portion **22** of the elongate body **20**.

In an alternative embodiment, if the preload member 50 is bowed prior to attachment to the elongate body 20, the front portion 22 may be manipulated only to the final position P3 without requiring additional bending to intermediary position P2. The prior bowing of the preload member 50 would thereby eliminate or significantly reduce the amount of expansion of the front portion 22 of the elongate body 20.

F. Final Product

The resulting product of the ski is a resilient elongate body 20 having a front portion 22 and a preload member 50 in constant stress. When the elongate body 20 is secured to the snowmobile or like vehicle, the user is able to operate the vehicle upon a surface covered with snow. When the front portion 22 of the elongate body 20 encounters an object such as a rock or snowdrift, the front portion 22 bends rearwardly along with the preload member 50 returning to its original relaxed structure. The preload member 50 therefore does not provide any rigid support or interference to the front portion 22 of the elongate body 20 when encountering an object and therefore allows the front portion 22 to bend throughout freely without interference. Furthermore, since the preload member 50 enters the relaxed structural state when the front portion 22 is bent upwardly and rearwardly, a "pivot point" is not created at the connect of the first end 52 of the preload member 50 to the middle portion 26 of the elongate member which allows the front portion 22 to bend throughout without interference or undue stress to the elongate body 20.

For example, when encountering an object the front portion 22 may bend rearwardly from final position P3 to intermediary position P2 wherein the preload member 50 has little or no stress within. The elongate body 20 is therefore able to provide a smooth transition over the object without causing a significant bump to the operator of the snowmobile. After the front portion 22 has passed over the object, the front portion 22 is allowed to return to final position P3 wherein the preload member 50 is again stressed. This process continues during the operation of the snowmobile

providing increased control for the operator of the snowmobile in various types of terrain as a significant portion of the elongate body 20 remains in contact with the surface.

5 As to a further discussion of the manner of usage and operation of the present invention, the same should be apparent from the above description. Accordingly, no further discussion relating to the manner of usage and operation will be provided. Although the present invention has been described in considerable detail with reference to certain preferred versions thereof, other versions are possible. It should also be stated at
10 this point that although this invention is described in the context of a snowmobile, this invention would be equally useful on airplane skis, BOMBARDIERS, SNO-SCOOTERS, and other similar vehicles.

15 With respect to the above description then, it is to be realized that the optimum dimensional relationships for the parts of the invention, to include variations in size, materials, shape, form, function and manner of operation, assembly and use, are deemed to be within the expertise of those skilled in the art, and all equivalent structural variations and relationships to those illustrated in the drawings and described in the specification are intended to be encompassed by the present invention.

20 Therefore, the foregoing is considered as illustrative only of the principles of the invention. Further, since numerous modifications and changes will readily occur to those skilled in the art, it is not desired to limit the invention to the exact construction and operation shown and described, and accordingly, all suitable modifications and
25 equivalents may be resorted to, falling within the scope of the invention.